

## Laurie Baker

I learn my architecture by watching what ordinary people do; in any case it is always the cheapest and simplest because ordinary people do it. They don't even employ builders, the families do it themselves. The job works, you can see it in the old buildings — the way wood lattice work with a lot of little holes filters the light and glare. I'm absolutely certain that concrete frames filled with glass panels is riot the answer. My clients have always been Indian. I've not even had the foreign-returned to deal with, since I work primarily with the poor and I've always wanted to give people what they want and what they need which obviously is all Indian. My feeling as an architect is that you're not after all trying to put up a monument which will be remembered as a 'Laurie Baker Building' but Mohan Singh's house where he can live happily with his family.

## Gerard Da Cunha Baker of India

I was an anarchic 19 year old student of architecture on a study tour to the south of India, when I saw two buildings done by Laurie Baker. The first was a one-time home of his with a doughnut plan. It had no windows and just the bare essential doors. All ventilation was through traditional brick *jalis* (trellis) and the roof was an A-frame made of bamboo which carried a coconut thatch roof. The curve of the plan gave privacy to the various spaces. The other building was a health centre with a more complex plan and also had a courtyard. Both these buildings moved me deeply. That night the principal of the local school of architecture hosted a dinner for our group and in his welcome speech derided “an English quack who claimed to be an architect”.

Back in Delhi, I read messianic articles by Baker such as “Roof for Roofless Millions” and “Low-cost Buildings for all”. Within the year, I began to feel terribly suffocated in college and Baker seemed to be my escape. I travelled to his home and refused leave until he promised me an apprenticeship. Over the next year I was his errand boy—organizing materials, paying labor and doing design tasks a third year student of architecture is capable of.

He had a strange style of working. He worked completely alone, and his office was a little room 3 m x 1.8 m where everything was within arm's reach (though not necessarily findable). He began work before dawn and at about eight o'clock began the rounds of each site. Most of his plans were on the back of carefully opened envelopes and other salvaged paper. At each site he gave instructions for the day, explaining in a combination of the Queen's English and extremely poor Hindi and Malayalam (the local language), together with a great deal of mime and wonderful sketches (on cards made on the back invitations). These sketches were the working drawings and were done upside down, so that the mason could see it develop. He used a lot of chalk on the walls to place windows, draw reinforcement and explain an idea. Throughout the visit, he was clowning around and in the best of humor, his mind furiously ticking away developing a dream.

He seemed to produce numerous options at each step and he'd then choose one and change it as it physically developed. The laying out of buildings was my greatest lesson. He'd have a centre line drawing, which he marked, on site. Next he walked into each room and studied the view, looking to see if his assumptions fitted the land. He then re-marked the building, most often changing the plan until he was truly satisfied. I watched in bewilderment as these daily site visits caused the, creation of wonderful and individual projects. The buildings sat snug on the land, caught the breeze and captured the views. They

were magical inside — custom-made creations for their owners. I believe that he actually reinforces the personality of his clients in his buildings.

Baker had consciously chosen his materials of rubble foundations, exposed country brick walls and a R.C.C. filler slab (with the capability of a 3.6-m span). These are his basic building blocks with which he weaves his designs—folding arcs, curving walls and slabs giving them strength. He uses the brick *jali* to let in subtle light and breeze. He conceives in 3-dimensions, carving out space like a magician. Space under the stairs and within the apex of the space roof between the low height of the garage and the next slab, within the drop of the land and the floor, are all fodder for his imagination. Baker uses geometry as a basis of his designs. The circle, the triangle, hexagon, spiral, etc. etc., every conceivable shape is employed. The choice of shape or combination of shapes to form the matrix of the brief. The resulting plan is of great economy and functionality and is of course a visual treat. His mastery over the subject is so great that he works with great speed, creating numerous well worked out options in a very short span of time. I remember his visiting Baroda for an industrial group and creating 15 designs for buildings over a 2 day period. However complex a building of his may seem, they are exceedingly simple to build and have been conceived out of constructional practice. Baker is the intrinsic inventor, always sniffing around looking at materials and thinking of new ways to use them. This restlessness gives his buildings a wonderful experimental quality.

Baker explains it as "Always living close to nature I learnt many lessons from the design of God's creations. Very rarely do we find the square or the rectangle but very often the circle is used.....and building becomes more fun with the circle".<sup>1</sup> To understand Baker's ideas, it is important to study his background, influences and philosophy. Baker was born in England in 1917 and was educated at the Birmingham School of Architecture. During "World War II, he worked in an ambulance unit in China and Burma. While returning to England in 1944, Baker met Mahatma Gandhi in Mumbai and was very impressed and this meeting probably caused him to return to India. Gautam Bhatia in his book on Baker says "Baker's instinctive response to Gandhi's simplicity and his acceptance of the frugal style of life in Pithoragarh stems perhaps from his Quaker background. The vigorous Quaker upbringing, with its emphasis on simplicity and austerity, its rejection of all ornament and luxury as sinful self—indulgence, was reinforced by the theories of modernism that were current during his architectural training—the one complementing the other".<sup>2</sup>

Baker returned to India in 1945 as a social worker—architect trying to right the wrongs perpetrated by colonialism. He soon realized that his English education was of no use: "I felt less knowledgeable than the stupidest village idiot for he seemed to know what a termite and a monsoon and black cotton soil were. I had brought with me my text books, reference books and construction manuals, but a bundle of comic strips would have been as helpful".<sup>3</sup>

In 1948 he married Elizabeth Jacob, a likeminded doctor from Kerala and they set up a hospital in the Himalayas which they ran for 16 years. It was during this period that Baker became fascinated by vernacular architecture and he began re-educating himself watching local masons and villagers work. He began getting commissions and designed schools, colleges and the odd religious building, which he enjoyed. During his travels he gained an insight into the poverty of the masses of people and truly empathized with them: "Seeing Millions of people living a hand-to-mouth existence made me come to abhor all forms of extravagance and waste"<sup>4</sup> and he defined his architecture "to be 'small' is not only 'beautiful' but is often essential and even more important than 'large', and that if we architects are even to start coping effectively with the real building problems and the housing needs of the world, we must learn how to build as inexpensively as possible".<sup>5</sup>

His design philosophy grew out of the larger issues of his life “I am now convinced that good or bad design, or good or bad taste has little to do with color, or form, or texture, or costliness—but that it has only to do with honesty and truth in the choice of materials and the method of using them”. “..... all efforts to 'put on a big show' or indulge in deceit to make ourselves look greater than we are, seem to be quite pointless ..... anti-facadeism has definitely been a very noticeable and a deliberate characteristic of Laurie Baker Architecture.... ”.<sup>6</sup>

In 1968 Baker moved to Trivandrum and set up his unusual architectural practice. His views on economical building and simplicity in design were by now well developed and he aired them at each and every opportunity. Commissions came in aplenty, through his favorite ones were for the poor. Film studios, fishing villages, auditoriums, institutions came his way. The middle class embraced Baker as a savior to make their dream houses on a limited budget.

Baker stuck to his Spartan style of functioning, hardly charging any fees for his work. He continued on this with his evolutionary style of building—“Personally, I am not happy designing buildings by sitting in isolation at a desk in an office. My designing comes into my head while I'm with a client on their site — and I believe, like the people, in improvisation and alteration as the work proceeds”.<sup>7</sup> The human being was central in his scheme of things, “I have never had any personal doubts about who my real clients are. There have never been to me categories' — 'tribals', 'fisherman', 'HIG (High Income Group)', E.W.S (Economically Weaker Sections). They have been people with names and personalities”.<sup>8</sup> Even at the height of his fame, nothing pleased him more than a request to make an additional toilet or even a door for a house he had built in the past.

As Baker's fame spread, he became an important force in shaping government policy in housing and rural development and for reconstruction after natural disasters such as earthquakes and cyclones. His emphasis on cost reduction in a field where consultants work on the basis of commission made him many enemies in the establishment who criticized his methods and technology. Over the years the longevity of his technology has proved these skeptics wrong. Baker's personal commitment to low-cost construction and the avoidance of waste is so dominant that he avoids speaking about his architectural design, which is a real pity as his significant contribution on the subject is often neglected. In his public and personal life, Baker has displayed a morality and a sense of purpose and conviction which is very rare in the profession. He speaks his mind with fearlessness on each and every issue which concerns him — human rights, the senselessness of developing nuclear weapons or the consumerism that sweeps the country. He is a prolific author and pens his books in the form of illustrated manuals all by himself. His titles vary from “Rubbish”, “Mud”, “Earthquake”, “How to reduce Building Cost” etc., which deal with the design aspects of their subjects.

Baker's example raises fundamental question on how one should practice architecture in rural India. Do we need the trappings of the office, the working drawing, the specialized contractor? The success of Baker with his pencil stubs and worn out scale seem to suggest otherwise.

“Is Baker a traditionalist or a modernist?” a question often asked. Modernity in the Indian context is associated with steel, glass and concrete — materials which Baker abhors. He strongly believes that modernity in the Indian context should mean encompassing the whole population and that marrying traditional technology with modern knowledge is the key to real and meaningful development: “my observation is that vernacular architecture almost always has apt solutions to all our problems of building. All that is required is to go a step further with the research our forefathers have done that is, to improve on what has already been accomplished.”<sup>9</sup>

What is Baker's contribution to Indian architecture? I personally believe that in the context of India's socio-economic condition, the profession of architecture is an elitist one. Baker can be credited with having shown us how to make our profession a mainstream one, touching the lives of common people and solving the real problems facing society. In terms of design, I consider him to be the grand wizard. One who can with so little do so much — taking simple materials, low budgets and creating palaces for people and in the league of the great masters. Baker has shown that it is possible to create a modern Indian architecture derived from local forms, material and practice together with modern knowledge and a strong ideology, an architecture which is not a part of fashion, but which has a timeless quality about it. What then is Laurie Baker's legacy? To begin with, India was a great nation with a rich culture and tradition and a mosaic of great diversity. Colonialism stopped its growth and we now face a bleak future with a large population and great poverty. In the last decade the winds of globalization are sweeping across the nation bringing in a world culture and aesthetic, further weakening our fragile traditions. Architecture too has been no exception, with our inspiration coming from the west in the form of climatically unsuitable buildings, which use scarce resources and energy. Laurie Baker has shown us that an alternative does exist. Is Baker to be like the lone red Indian chief as seen in the movie 'Soldier Blue' riding into battle, outnumbered by the American cavalry? Will his legacy be massacred as the Indian chief was? This is a question each and every Indian architect must answer.

Notes:

1. *Baker on Laurie Baker Architecture*. Laurie Baker (unpublished).
2. *Laurie Baker Life, Works and Writings*. Gautam Bhatia, Penguin Books, 1991
3. Same as 1.
4. Ibid
5. Ibid
6. Ibid
7. "Architecture and the People". Laurie Baker (unpublished).
8. Ibid
9. *Science and Rural Development in Mountains* (edited by J.S. Singh, S.P. Singh and C. Shastri-Gyandoya Prakashan. Nainital, 1980).

### **Gerard Da Cunha**

Born in India in 1955. Graduated from the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi in 1979. Apprenticed with Laurie Baker 1974-75. In private practice since 1983 in the State of Goa in South India. Received the Commendation Award in Rural Architecture (J. K. Cement) in 1991, the Designer of the Year nomination (Interiors India) in 1993 and was listed in the "581 Architects of the World" published by TOTO, Japan in 1996. Was invited speaker at the "International Symposium of Innovative Architecture in Asia", Osaka 1997 and Bangalore 1999. In 1998 brought out a book called *Houses of Goa* on the Indo -Portuguese architectural tradition and also prepared an exhibition on the same subject, which travelled, to Porto, Lisbon, Mumbai and Delhi. He was the Indian Delegate to "East Wind 2000" held in Tokyo in July 2000. He is currently setting up an architectural museum in Goa. His work spans restorations, private residences, institution, resorts and townships.

## **Mohsen Mostafavi**

### **Enriching Identities—the Architecture of Laurie Baker**

Not that long ago, I was sitting in the back of a New York taxicab when its Indian driver began playing a meditation tape. The narrator spoke in a low and rhythmic voice. Despite the fact that the only words I could comprehend were the name of the Austrian philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and the references to some of his books, the tape was mesmerizing. At that moment, passing through the streets of New York, there was a wide gulf between the mental and geographical spaces through which we were travelling.

Situations like this are typical of the everyday landscape in an age of globalization and post-colonialism — a landscape in which boundaries are simultaneously transgressed and reaffirmed, in which an awareness of the differences between the other and the self can be both diminished and heightened. Much has been said and written about the dualities between the global and the local. Those in favor of globalization describe the benefits of a world without boundaries, united by ever faster mechanisms of communication. Others warn against the dangers of such a process — the potential erasure of local identity and difference. But dualities are never as simple as they appear.

Today, a greater proportion of the world's population lives in exile than ever before. Economic factors often provide the primary fuel in the drive to migrate and, as a result, people tend to move from the poorer to the richer nations of the world. It is something of an anomaly, therefore, that Laurie Baker, a young British architect, should have chosen to settle in India during the initial period of that country's independence from British rule — a time when most of his fellow countrymen were travelling in the opposite direction.

A few years after completing his architectural studies in England, Baker joined the Friends Ambulance Unit, serving in China and Burma during the latter part of the Second World War. While attending to the wounded, and later to those suffering from leprosy, his own health deteriorated and it was decided that he should return to England to recover. It was on this journey home that Baker was stranded in Bombay, where he encountered Mahatma Gandhi — a man who was to have a deep influence on his later life and work.

Following his eventual arrival in England, Baker came into contact with an organization that dealt with leprosy in India. They were, he says, “looking for a builder-architect-engineer sort of person, with planning and building experience and with knowledge of leprosy and its treatment, to convert refugee centers into actual hospitals”. Having found a position to which he was so uncannily suited, it is no surprise that Baker returned to India in 1945.

There he began the task of improving existing facilities and building new centers to house leprosy clinics. It was during that time that Baker met an Indian doctor who was working in a hospital in Hyderabad. He married her in 1948. The couple spent the next sixteen years in the Pithoragarh district of Uttar Pradesh, in the Himalayas. When I met Laurie Baker he told me how, in addition to conducting the necessary building works, he had spent much of this period assisting his wife in her clinics and dealing with patients.

In the course of these activities, Baker would have had the opportunity to become familiar with the traditions of local construction and to appreciate the advantages of using appropriate and functional building techniques. To him, the principles of this manner of building must have seemed in agreement with the general tenets of the Modern Movement and its championing of functionalism. But whereas modernism soon turned functionalism into a style, the vernacular architecture of Uttar Pradesh showed a

pragmatic sympathy with the local conditions of topography and climate, and an imaginative use of resources that were easily at hand. For Baker this lesson had been emphasized by the ideas and teachings of Gandhi, in particular by his belief that the ideal house in the ideal village would be constructed using materials that could be found within a five-mile radius of the building site.

Some years later, Baker would write that “Our 'backward' ancestors had learned how to live with and cope with the problems of climate. They had learned that a pitched or a sloping roof lessened the effect of all hazards. They knew the movements of air currents and placed their wall openings almost at ground level.”<sup>1</sup> This text, published in the *Hindustan Times*, not only catalogues systematically the intelligence of “our ancestors” with regard to the art of building, but also demonstrates Baker's own deep sensibilities towards materials and their use in construction. Indeed, the architecture of Laurie Baker does not simply replicate the local vernacular; rather it combines its principles with ideas and innovations of his own invention.

During the last fifty years Baker is said to have been responsible for over one thousand houses, as well as numerous other institutional and public projects. Amongst his better-known works, the majority belong to the period after his departure from India's rural Tibetan border (during the Indo-Chinese disputes), for the southern state of Kerala, where he has lived for over thirty years.

It remains an irony, however, that while Baker has been attempting to utilize local traditions and craftsmanship, much of the rest of India has been fascinated with the International Style. For a while a desire for the (superficially) progressive imagery of such architecture might be understandable but it has led to a number of additional complications. For example, in hot and humid climates, the use of flat roofs in many new buildings has led to problems — particularly during the monsoon season. The reason for Baker's preference for a sloping roof on many of his buildings is not purely aesthetic; this design has better thermal characteristics and allows easier solutions to the problems caused by excessive rainwater. In addition, sloping roofs can more easily be used to provide for overhangs that offer shade from the sun.

Another characteristic of Baker's work is a particular pattern of brickwork that allows a number of small openings in the walls. This brickwork, known as '*jali*', is a simple and effective antidote to the hot and humid weather of Kerala. The small openings in the walls reduce the glare of the sun while allowing the free passage of cooling air through the building. The resulting effects of light and shade bring about a sense of calmness and tranquility — characteristics that are often found in simple buildings. But this technique has another major benefit: it reduces the cost of construction. In many cases '*jali*' brickwork removes the need for windows and consequently eliminates the costs — which are substantial — associated with their manufacture.

At the Centre for Development Studies in Ulloor, Trivandrum (where he has been responsible for the design of all the campus buildings), Baker has experimented with '*jali*' walls that have a thickness of only half a brick. The stability and rigidity of the wall has been enhanced by a variety of undulations. While this suggests that there is a pragmatic reason behind these formal manipulations, invariably their effect is anything but rational. The surface quality of many of these stepped or curved buildings is akin to early Roman buildings but, more strikingly, it recalls the Baroque intensity and fluidity associated with the work of Borromini and, more recently, the breathtaking articulations of structural brickwork by the engineer, Eladio Dieste. Baker often exploits the interplay between the external and internal walls of his buildings. Deviations from the straight line allow for a juxtaposition of the building's functional requirements (including built-in furniture) to be approximated and fitted against the fluid 'irrationality' of many of its internal walls.

It is clear that much of Baker's architecture has been planned just in response to the specific conditions of topography and climate, but with the aim of providing the best possible buildings for the least amount of money. At the heart of this approach is the influence of Gandhi's personal and worldly modesty and Quaker ideals of austerity (Baker had a Quaker upbringing) — both of which run counter to today's trend of ostentatious display.

Despite the reticence of his works, Baker pays great attention to the specific requirements of his clients. Rather than conceiving of architecture as *Gesamtkunstwerk* — a total work of art dominated by the architect — he constructs an architecture that, in its attention to the desires and habits of its occupants, becomes a stage for their own everyday performance. In the house for R. Narayanan and his wife Geeta, a classical dancer, such a performance space was provided in the most literal way. The house, as if a dancer, spirals around an open court with a coconut tree at its centre. The kitchen, dining, and living room occupy a relatively open plan that culminates in a raised stage for performances. A small stair leads from the stage directly to the bedrooms on the floor below.

For the design of the house of P.K. Sivanandan, a yoga enthusiast, a similar degree of attention was required in order to ensure that the client's needs were met. Baker designed a Y-shaped house incorporating a room for yoga with three open sides that took centre stage on top of the main entrance porch. Many of Laurie Baker's houses are deeply ingrained with the memories and personalities of their inhabitants. In this sense, many of Baker's houses are a monument, not so much to their architect, as to their owners.

Yet, even though he has often spoken of the way in which his buildings relate to ordinary people — to what they do and how they build — Baker's is not architecture without architects. Regardless of the fact that many of the buildings use readily available materials they do not remain anonymous. There is still a foreign element, traces of his early culture and upbringing that are evident in much of his work.

In the Centre for Development Studies, where Baker has been in charge of transforming the nine-acre site in a suburb of Trivandrum since 1967, his design does not rely on a single master plan, but has been an organic development along the hilly terrain. The various functions of the Centre — teaching rooms, student accommodation, library, computer centre, etc. — have been housed in buildings that, while distinctly different have enough of a similar palette to bind together, a coherence that is assisted by the sympathetic handling of the site and the design of the landscapes between the buildings. These spaces of repose are simply made, a result of the careful juxtaposition of the buildings and the modifications to the topography.

A female colleague of Baker showed a group of us around the Centre. She was simply in awe of what Bakerji (an Indian term of endearment) had managed to create in India. For her, it was the technical fact of being able to provide good and affordable housing for the poor which seemed to have been such a great lesson gained from working with him.

For Baker, the necessity for financial prudence may become the basis for new design opportunities. Baker himself observes that “the length of the wall enclosing a given area is shorter if the shape is circular and longer if the shape around the same area is a square or a rectangle. This is an important factor in cost-reducing exercises! Furthermore, I have found the answer to many spatial and planning problems by using the circle and the curve instead of the square and the straight line — and building; becomes much more fun with the circle.”

This reveals a great deal about an architect who has devoted his life to searching for an architecture that is 'Indian' in the broadest sense of what that word can mean. For an Englishman to have achieved such a task and for it to be so fully embraced by the local community is inspiring. It is worth remembering that when Baker arrived in India, the country had three schools of architecture and only three hundred architects, most of whom were trained according to the western models of architectural education. After colonial rule, the concept of an Indian architecture — like the idea of the nation itself — was something that had to be reinvented.

In 1946, Nehru described a country of “four hundred million separate individual men and women, each differing from the other, each living in a private universe of thought and feeling”. Unity was one of the main motivations behind the planning of Chandigarh, but the idea of a new 'city', completely free of the burdens of its ancient as well as its more recent history has, according to Sunil Khilnani, “aspired to a neutrality, a zero degree condition that would make it equally resistant to claims upon it of any and all cultural and religious groups.”

Le Corbusier, despite the articulation and discovery of enormous formal architectural ideas, ultimately failed to propose an architecture that could be inhabited by those responsible for its construction. Chandigarh, as an icon of nationhood, fails to recognize both the necessity and the fragility of the local. Here the local is meant not only in its physical sense but also in terms of the rites and rituals that produce local identities. The buildings of Laurie Baker, his churches, schools, houses, construct and contest relationships between their users and the environments that participate in the production of new and meaningful identities.

**Note**

1 Laurie Baker, "Low-Cost Buildings for All", *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 17 January 1974.

**Mohsen Mostafavi**

Taught at Frankfurt Academy of Fine Arts (1983-1984), Department of Architecture, Cambridge University (1979-1985), Architectural Association School of Architecture (1978-1986), Graduate School of Fine Arts, Pennsylvania University (1987-1990), Graduate School of Design, Harvard University (1990-1995). From 1995 and currently, Chairman at Architectural Association School of Architecture, London.



## India, Kerala, and Laurie Baker

Yoshio Kato

In Japanese culture, India is a country that is significant in a number of ways at the deepest psychological level. Historically, under the influence of the Buddhist concept of the Western Paradise, it was often viewed as a holy place or the source of Asian values. In Tokyo, the Tsukiji Honganji Temple and the Diet Building are said to have been influenced by Indian architecture. More recently, India has exerted an instinctual attraction for many in Japan as a country where the customs of traditional society still exist in a form relatively untouched by modern civilization, a chaotic realm where anything and everything can be found. As a result, whenever a longer holiday approaches, visitors to the Indian Embassy in Tokyo will see long lines of people waiting for visas. Most of them are not there for the first time. The overwhelming majority are interested in dance, music, literature, and religion, although more people have now begun to view India from different viewpoints. Nevertheless, almost all of visitors from Japan travel exclusively in the middle and northern parts of the country, with very few venturing into the South. Architectural tours are usually limited to Chandigarh, Ahmedabad, and Mumbai (Bombay). Until very recently, there were almost no reports in the newspapers that cities such as Bangalore have become the Asian version of Silicon Valley.

Kerala is at the southern tip of India, and culturally rather distinctive, with styles of music and dance that are different from elsewhere. It has a five-century long history of contact with the West, having served as the entrance to India from the West. For example, the grave of Vasco da Gama is located there, on a site facing the Arabian Sea. Centered around cities such as Cochin and Mankotta Islands, there is a varied landscape with houseboats drifting slowly down stately rivers, green fields that seem to continue forever, resorts on the Mediterranean-like Indian Ocean, and a richly expressive sky.

Laurie Baker is an architect who was born and educated in England. A meeting with Mahatma Gandhi is said to have prompted him to spend the last 50 years of his life in India. For most of that time, he has lived in Trivandrum in Kerala. Indian people are thankful to him for having made Kerala known around the world. His practice and enlightenment activities are based on firmly held convictions. Up to now, he has designed and built nearly 2000 buildings and is revered by many Indians for his good will and benevolence. As Japanese, we are reminded of the role and achievements of Antonin Raymond, noting the similarities and differences.

My first trip south of Mumbai was in September of 1995, when I went to Trivandrum. The motive was to participate in a joint tour on the theme of sustainability, organized by the Karnataka Architectural Association, CAA/WSE, and Ekistics. On the first day of the tour, we were thrown into a stepwise cliff hotel designed by Charles Correa, against a background of a deep blue sea, azure sky, and green palm trees on the beach. I remember being slightly disconcerted by the distinctive atmosphere of a luxury resort. The arrival ceremony was also lavish. Early on the next day we all boarded a bus and rode for several hours inland. The destination was the meeting hall on the grounds of a church, many times simpler than the hotel we had left.

Forever, the roofs of the corridors connecting the buildings were light and well balanced. Someone remarked that they had been designed by Laurie Baker. I had never heard the name, but usually I began to understand, along with the meaning of the word.

After declaring the meeting open, the chairman immediately denounced Laurie Baker, the architect who had done so much for India. The elderly gentleman who stood up had been quiet and inconspicuous at the previous day's arrival ceremony. I remembered him as an older person without much of a sense of

arrogance. He had a pale complexion, brown hair, a long face and was not very tall. He was wearing tasteful casual clothes, an Indian dress, and seemed to be clearly different from the Indian people present in his unpretentious rugged simplicity. The chairman lauded him as an important benefactor of Kerala in India, a person who deserved praise from the Indian Architectural Association CAA/WSE for his many years of dedicated activity. I asked a neighbor "Who is this person?" and was informed that "He is British, and has worked only in India....." He added that Baker was 79 and about to retire after fifty-year tenure, most of it spent in Kerala.

Baker's reply was as follows. He cited Ernst Friedrich Schumacher's "Small is beautiful" and said that he was very unsure that his work up to then had been appreciated by the rich. He had not been aware of ecology before coming to Trivandrum, when he designed the CDS he realized that ecology had been part of his instincts ever since his architectural education in Birmingham, England. He was fond of the term "Design Professional" as a description of himself, and felt that as a person in this profession it was hard to stay uninvolved with the problems of a society where there were so many poor people without homes. He continued by pointing out that many people had been driven from their homes by a dam, and asked whether this was a good thing.

At last I realized that the tour I was participating in was for the purpose of honoring his work. This was the reason why it began in Trivandrum. I was the only foreigner in the audience who had been unaware of the work of Laurie Baker.

The next day we visited the development center (CDS), where I was strongly impressed by the ecological architectural methodology. All of the exterior walls were of brick, with a wide variety of screens. There was a total harmony brought about through the conversation with light and wind. The central tower library was far cooler inside than the temperature outside. The reason was that updrafts from the surrounding ponds flowed into the tower, a clear case of natural ventilation that would now be called the solar chimney effect.

The 1995 tour of Trivandrum covered only some wayside premises meeting hall, and the CDS. Some individuals are born with a sense that it is their mission to work for society, and some individuals live out very private lives. Laurie Baker clearly belongs to the former group. He regularly strives for anonymity, and his designs do not call for anything special or expensive. All of his clients are Indian, and he stands in the client's place, using very inexpensive local materials. He promotes the use of brick, and had developed architectural methods for the creation of architectural materials. Nevertheless, he has created one after the other marvelous buildings marked by splendid patterns of light, heat and wind. In March 2000 I participated in another tour in which a meeting with Laurie Baker was scheduled. We traveled from the East to the South of India, but were informed as we approached Trivandrum that we would be not be able to meet Baker because of his poor health. The rumor was that at 84 years he was in a state in which he might die any time. But on the scheduled day we were informed that Baker would be able to meet with some of us, provided that it was a small group. I went together with Mohsen Mostafavi, director of the AA School and some Indian friends. We found Laurie Baker in good spirits and very ready to talk. Although he retired in 1995 after building so many works of architecture, Laurie Baker was still full of the will to create, and seems more interested in architecture and society than ever. I cannot help recalling the enlightening role of Antonin Raymond and the energy of Togo Murano, who continued to work until the day he died at the age of 94.

#### **Yoshio Kato**

Graduated from Architectural Engineering of Waseda University, 1968. Focused to design passive solar and environment designs, he works in Yoshio Kato Atelier. Received Environmental Architectural Award of JIA in 2000.

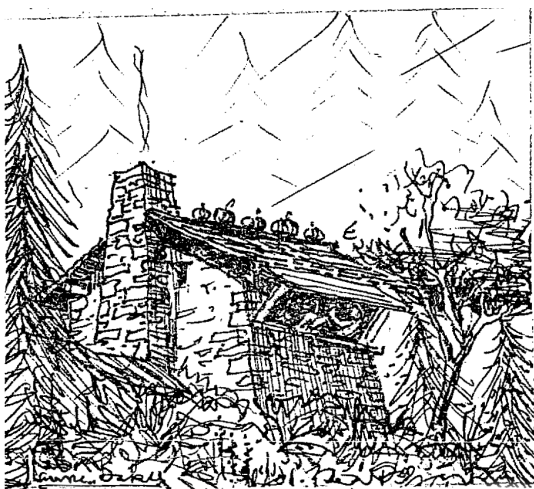
- 1 Only accept a REASONABLE BRIEF
- 2 Discourage EXTRAVAGANCE & SNOBBERY
- 3 Always study your SITE vs SOIL, WATER, TOPOGRAPHY, CLIMATE.
- 4 See potential SERVICES—WATER, DRAINAGE, POWER, FUEL, etc
- 5 YOU, yourself, get ACCURATE site DETAILS & INSTA FACTS.
- 6 Every BUILDING should be UNIQUE. No 2 people or families are alike. So why should their HABITATS be alike?
- 7 Study & KNOW <sup>the</sup> LOCAL MATERIALS—availability, costs, <sup>performance, adaptability</sup> techniques.
- 8 Study & KNOW ENERGY <sup>Manufacture of</sup> used in MATERIALS } & TRANSPORT } AVOID energy intensive materials wherever possible
- 9 Remember that CODES are ADVISORY & NOT MANDATORY
- 10 DONT ROB NATIONAL RESOURCES. <sup>Don't use them extravagantly or unnecessarily.</sup>  
(Stone, Brick, Lumber, Water, Electricity, etc.)
- 11 BE HONEST re DESIGN, Materials, Construction, Costs & MISTAKES.
- 12 AVOID OPPULANCE & 'SHOWING OFF' <sup>and using currently fashionable gimmicks.</sup>
- 13 Get your CONSCIENCE out of DEEP-FREEZE & USE it.
- 14 LOOK CLOSELY at your PREJUDICES & Question them. <sup>Are they justifiable &/or reasonable.</sup>
- 15 HAVE FAITH in your CONVICTIONS & HAVE COURAGE to STICK to them.
- 16 Make 'LOW-COSTery' a HABIT & a WAY-OF-LIFE. <sup>Not just for 'the poor' but for others too.</sup>
- 17 Keep your KNOWLEDGE & INFORMATION UP-TO-DATE
- 18 DONT DO WHAT IS NOT NECESSARY
- 19 ABOVE ALL - USE COMMON SENSE.
- 20 TRIM your STAFF, DRAWINGS & EQUIPMENT. <sup>Trim & Transport. Trim Expenses</sup>

Lennie Baker



1948

We went for our honeymoon to the upper foothills of the Himalaya near the Nepal border. Kusi was immediately surrounded by patients who occupied the tea shop the locals loaned us to live in. We moved into our tent & for privacy (!) we built a machan in the trees to relax in.



1949

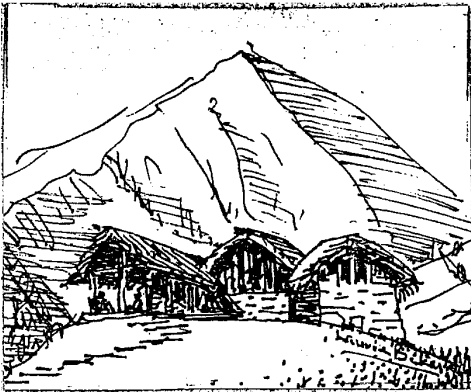
The honeymoon seemed destined to go on for quite a time so we built a small one roomed house of stone from the site & slates from a mile away & trees from the surrounding forest. The back of the house was over a steep hill side so we had a 'wall' which opened up so that we'd get a good view of the snows.



1950

After a year or so the locals gave us a mountain top to build a hospital & our house on it. We had a glorious view of about 400 miles of snow peaks & the honeymoon went on for 18 years.

1956



This was a temporary house built of dry stone walls, (no mortar) bamboo and thatch built quickly to live in when we moved from the Himalaya to the hills of Kerala.



This is the house at Vagamon built at the foot of the mountains with the stream dammed to form a lake. The outer buildings were occupied by our nurses who worked with Kuni in the hospital.



This was a quickly built house on the site belonging to a friend for our use when we decided to take three months holiday — which eventually turned into a permanent holiday in Trivandrum. The friend is still living in this house twenty years later! (It was cheaper to build a house than to rent accommodation.)